

Lesson 3

How to Involve Children and Youth in Family History

Introduction

Many people desire to know where they come from, but a sense of belonging is especially important for children and youth. A knowledge about their family history gives children of all ages a sense of their place in the world. It can also give young people something to live up to—a legacy to respect. Family history also provides an opportunity for children and teenagers to make a meaningful contribution to something bigger than themselves.

This lesson provides ideas about how to involve children and youth in family history activities. Children and youth who develop an interest in family history are more likely to participate in family history throughout their lives.

Resources and information in this lesson include:

- [Activity Ideas](#)
- [Age Specific Suggestions](#)
- [Additional Resources](#)
- [Ideas for Teachers](#)
- [Appendix A—Instructions for Creating Family History Games](#)
- [Appendix B—Example of an Ancestor Coloring Book](#)

Activity Ideas

Parents, grandparents, and teachers can involve children and youth in family history in many ways. The following family history activities work well with children.

Talk to living relatives

Encourage children to talk to their living relatives, especially the older ones. Hearing stories about what life was like in the past helps young people connect to the past. This connection brings generations together and establishes strong family bonds.

Expert Tip: Take your children with you as you visit with a relative and teach them how to talk comfortably with older people. Explain what is appropriate and what is not appropriate.

Children and teenagers can interview relatives and record the interviews on a video- or audiotape. Questions they could ask include:

- Where did you grow up?
- What were your parents like? Your siblings?
- What do you remember about your grandparents?
- Who were your friends?
- What was school like for you?

- What did you do for fun when you were a child? when you were a teenager?
- What movies and songs did you like when you were young?
- How did you meet your spouse?
- What important lessons have you learned in your life?

For more information about conducting interviews, please refer to the lesson “How to Conduct Family History Interviews” [link to this lesson]. For a more detailed list of questions to ask a family member, please refer to “How to Conduct Family History Interviews,” [link to this lesson] and “How to Create a Personal History” [link to this lesson].

Tell stories

Tell stories about your life and the lives of your ancestors. Young people need more than facts and dates. They need the facts and dates packaged in interesting, meaningful, and memorable ways. The best way to create an interest in family history is by telling young people stories about real people. Fill your stories with interesting information, humorous details, and unusual facts that will capture a young imagination. Sharing family stories doesn’t have to be a big event; make it a common occurrence around the dinner table, in the car, or at bedtime.

Share heirlooms and photographs

Holding something that once belonged to an ancestor can be a powerful experience. Pictures and heirlooms make the past come alive. Children especially enjoy photographs that show how clothing and hairstyles have changed over the years. Keep photographs and family heirlooms around your home so children are constantly reminded of their heritage. Tell stories and histories about the item and its owner.

Attend family reunions

Family reunions are a good way for different generations and branches of a family to come together. A family reunion gives young people an opportunity to know relatives they might not otherwise meet. It gives them a chance to create experiences and memories that can last a lifetime. Help children and youth understand how they are related to each person they meet. For example, you might say, “This is your great-aunt Phyllis. She is your grandma’s older sister.”

Go on family history field trips

Children of all ages enjoy field trips. A family history field trip could be across the country or just down the street. Visit places your ancestors lived or worked. Visit graveyards. Go to museums or living history exhibits, such as a historically re-created village or a historical farm that shows how your ancestors lived. Celebrate your family’s ethnic heritage at a cultural festival. Use an Internet search engine to help you find festivals and living history exhibits in your area. Above all, make these trips fun for the children.

Play family history games

Games are a good way to make family history fun. Family history board are games available for purchase, but you can also make up games that are specific to your family. It’s easy to create a trivia or matching game or adapt a common game such as Bingo. Your children could even help make up the game. For examples of family games and instructions on how to create them, see appendix A of this lesson.

Involve entertainment

Music and movies from the past are another way to reach young people. Share music from different eras, and teach children some of the dances their grandparents used to dance. Children enjoy learning the old songs their great-grandparents used to sing. Watch movies that were popular during the lifetime of an ancestor or that portray a certain period in history. Children are often amazed to see some of the old silent movies that were popular in the past.

Celebrate with food

Food is an important part of holidays and family gatherings, and it was the same for our ancestors. Make your grandmother's apple pie recipe or your father's famous meatloaf for your children. Food from different countries where your ancestors lived can provide an interesting variation on your normal diet. International recipes are available on the Internet and in many cookbooks. You can prepare pastries from France or kimchi from Korea for a special family history meal. Visit www.cyndislist.com/recipes.htm for a list of Web sites that can help you.

Create personal histories

Help children and teenagers create their own personal histories. They could keep a journal, create a scrapbook, or write stories from their lives. Give them a camera or help them take pictures of events and save those photographs in an album. For a list of Web sites that may help you, go to www.cyndislist.com/photos.htm or www.cyndislist.com/scrapbooks.htm.

Tie family history into school work

Make the connection between what children learn in school and their family history. For example, if a child is studying a historical event, tell what an ancestor did who witnessed or participated in that event. Look on the Internet for information about what life was like during that time period and how wars and other events affected daily life.

If a teenager studies a book for school, tell about ancestors who lived at the same time as the author or who may have experienced some of the events described in the book. Help students learn about geography by looking on a map to see where ancestors lived. If children need to choose a state or country for a report, suggest that they choose a place where your ancestors lived. If you have photographs of the area your family came from, you can use those photographs to augment your child's studies.

Expert Tip: Thousands of photographs from the American Civil War are available on the Internet. Thousands of articles, stories, photographs, maps, statistics and other interesting things are available for every war in which the United States took part. Information about the wars of other nations may also be available on the Internet. Do a search on www.google.com or www.yahoo.com to see what is available.

Age-Specific Suggestions

Young Children

Children are never too young to begin learning about their family. Don't underestimate a child's ability to appreciate stories about ancestors, but consider each child's age and skills when you plan family history projects. Young children can:

- Illustrate their own bedtime stories about their ancestors.

- Create coloring books about specific ancestors or family stories. For an example of a coloring book, refer to Appendix B of this lesson.
- Fill out their own pedigree chart with your help or draw a family tree. These activities help them visualize how generations are connected and where they fit in the big picture. For a blank family tree that you can use, visit <http://genealogy.about.com>. For a blank pedigree chart, visit www.familysearch.org. Click on **Search** and then **Research Helps**. Choose **Sort by Document Type**, then **Form**, then **Pedigree Chart Form**.
- Create a pictorial pedigree chart by placing a small photograph of each ancestor by his or her name. From these photographs, children learn what each ancestor looked like, and children can compare similarities between themselves and their ancestors.

Teenagers

One key to involving teenagers in family history is to give them something meaningful to do. Although youth may not know how to do genealogical research, they often know how to use computers. Don't hesitate to ask for their help with a computer-related or Internet problem.

To help with family history, teenagers can:

- Search on the Internet for family history information. For more details on this subject, please refer to the FamilySearch lesson "How to Do Research on the Internet."
- Enter information into a genealogical database, such as Personal Ancestral File or a similar record management program.
- Record information on a pedigree chart or family group record.
- Create, edit, organize, and print digital pictures.
- Record personal histories of older relatives on video- or audiotape.
- Create and maintain a family Web site.
- E-mail relatives to find information.
- Create and edit a family newsletter.
- Clean a cemetery or transcribe headstones for a local historical society.
- Help with an indexing project for a local genealogical society or an organization like The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which accepts volunteers at www.familysearchindexing.org. To find the genealogical society in your area, visit www.familyhistory.com/societyhall/main.asp.

Expert Tip: *If a teenager or a group of teenagers is interested in working on an extraction project, they should work through a family history extraction specialist at a local ward or branch near their home.*

Conclusion

What interests one child may not interest another. Try different activities, according to a young person's interests and personality. Involving children and youth in family history can change their lives.

Additional Resources

Web Sites

- **Cyndi's List.** This comprehensive Web site lists many types of resources to get children and teenagers involved in family history. <http://www.cyndislist.com/kids.htm>.
- **Ancestors.** The Web site for the PBS program *Ancestors* provides a teacher's guide for starting a family history project. <http://www.pbs.org/kbyu/ancestors/firstseries/teachersguide/>
- **U.S. GenWeb Kidz.** This site contains information on how to get started in family history research, including mailing lists especially for kids. <http://www.rootsweb.com/~usgwkidz/>
- **Canadian GenWeb for Kids.** This Web site aims to get children and teenagers in Canada involved in family history. <http://www.rootsweb.com/~cangwkid/>
- **World GenWeb for Kids.** This site provides basic information for children and teenagers interested in family history. There is also information for school class projects on genealogy. <http://www.rootsweb.com/~wgwkids/>
- **Genealogy for Kids.** This site links to records and how-to articles about family history. <http://www.genealogyspot.com/features/kids.htm>
- **National Genealogical Society.** The National Genealogical Society has a Youth Resources Committee that gathers genealogy information suitable for ages 5 to 18. This site also includes lesson plans for teachers. <http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/youth.cfm>
- For examples of how to create your own “Jeopardy”-type game, visit <http://www.techteachers.com/jeopardytemplates.htm>.

Books

Ancestor Hunt: Finding Your Family Online by Nancy Shepherdson. This guide for grades 7 and up covers the basics, such as how to do oral interviews and research courthouse records, but emphasizes online sources and activities.

Climbing Your Family Tree: Online and Offline Genealogy for Kids by Ira Wolfman. This book covers all aspects of genealogy, including forms, interviews, documents, and Internet resources. For grades 5–9.

Creating Junior Genealogists: Tips and Activities for Family History Fun by Karen Frisch. This book has ideas on how to make family history fun for kids, as well as how to teach basics such as starting a family tree, exploring cemeteries, and finding records on the Internet.

Dig Up Your Roots and Find Your Branches: A Child's Guide to Genealogy by Susan H. Hubbs. This book contains step-by-step instructions for creating a family tree and searching for information. It also includes puzzles, charts, a genealogy dictionary, and a list of Web sites. For ages 4–8.

Do People Grow on Family Trees? Genealogy for Kids and Other Beginners by Ira Wolfman. This genealogical primer includes activities, history, photographs, illustrations, and reminiscences. Suitable for ages 8–12.

The Family Tree Detective: Cracking the Case of Your Family's Story by Ann Douglas. This book provides a solid method for conducting genealogical research for grades 4–8. Reproducible pages provide forms for making a family tree and recording family facts and lists of possible interview questions.

The Kids' Family Tree Book by Caroline Leavitt. This book contains research ideas and creative projects for young genealogists, including instructions on how to interview family members, find information, start a family newsletter, and more.

Roots for Kids: A Genealogy Guide for Young People by Susan Provost Beller. This book is based on a course the author developed for her fourth grade class, but it can be used by individuals as well as teachers. Subjects include asking questions and researching local, state, and national records. For grades 4–8.

Through the Eyes of Your Ancestors by Maureen Taylor. This book tells how to access a variety of resources, including vital records, church records, newspapers, Web sites, and more. For grades 4–8.

Ideas for Teachers

Teaching Goals

- Help class members find activities that will make family history a fun and positive activity for children.
- Help class members learn what resources are available.

Preparing to Teach

Before you teach, you will need to:

- Prepare examples of the activities described in this lesson and have them ready to show the class.
- Visit the Internet to see what information is available on genealogy Web sites so you can discuss with the class what the best sites have to offer.

Teaching Ideas

In preparing to teach this lesson, consider the following suggestions:

- Become familiar with the resources listed in this lesson.
- Prepare to share success stories of getting children and youth involved in family history.
- Before the class, talk to children and youth in your area. Ask them what kind of family history experiences they have had. Ask them what kinds of things would encourage them to get involved in family history.
- Prepare a list of family history resources in your area for children and teenagers. This may include cemeteries, museums, festivals, and so forth. If possible, provide the class with fliers or other literature about these resources that include prices and hours of operation.
- Ask the class members to brainstorm ideas of how they could involve the children and youth they know in family history.
- If you teach this material in more than one class session, give class members an assignment and ask them to report back at the next class. The assignment could be to visit one of the Web sites listed or to make one of the family history games and play it. Have the class members share their experiences.
- In class, do one of the activities listed in this lesson. The adults may enjoy the activities and games as much as the children. In this way, they can experience how such an activity might excite a child.

Suggestions for Teaching This Lesson to Children or Youth

In preparing to teach this lesson, consider the following suggestions:

- Ask the students which of their relatives they would like to interview. Have them write down some of the questions they would ask.

- Contact the students in advance, and ask them to prepare to show a picture or other object and tell about an ancestor. They could bring a picture or a family heirloom and tell a story about someone in their family. They could even dress up as that ancestor.
- Contact parents in advance, and ask them some favorite stories about their ancestors. Share those stories with the class. You could have the children guess which class member is the descendant of the people in the stories.
- Have each student or their parents bring some food from an ancestral country. Have each person tell about their ancestors while everyone tries the food.
- If you teach this material in more than one class session, give the students an assignment and ask them to report back at the next class. The assignment could be to visit a family history Web site or to make a family history game and play it. Have class members share their experiences.

Appendix A

Instructions for Creating Family History Games

Family Tree Game

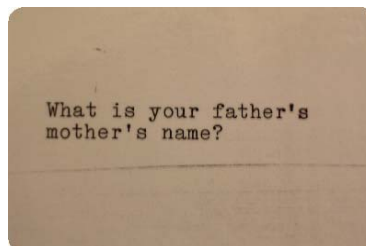
Draw a simple tree shape on cardboard, and color it in. A more permanent game board can be made by drawing or appliquéing a tree onto a piece of fabric. Around the tree, draw or appliqué red circles that represent apples.



Copy about 20 apple outlines onto red cardstock or construction papers. Cut them out in simple circle shapes, and laminate them for added durability.



Game pieces in different colors can be made by covering pennies with felt on both sides. Get one or two dice to move around the board. Create about 40 small question cards to fit your teaching objectives and the children's ages. Laminate them for added durability. Below is an example of a question you might use.



How to play the game

Each player chooses a different color playing piece. Roll the dice to see who plays first. One or two dice may be used to go around the board. Faster-moving games are better for younger children. Each time a player moves, he or she picks a question card from the pile and answers the

question. If the answer is correct, the player receives an apple. If it is incorrect, he moves back three spaces, and the card is put on the bottom of the question pile. Used question cards are set aside. The person who has the most apples at the end of the game wins.

Variations

With small children you may want to focus on moving around the board, so each time a player completes a round, the player gets an apple, and the game is over when each person has a certain number of apples. The whole group can answer the question.

Memory Match Games

Scanned pictures can be used to create memory cards about 2½ to 3 inches square (bigger for younger children). The people represented can be either living or deceased. Some families may want to use this activity to get or keep children acquainted with living relatives they don't see very often. Cards can be:

- Two identical pictures.
- A baby and an adult picture of the same person.
- A picture of an ancestor on one card and his or her name on the other.
- A picture of an ancestor and a picture of something significant, such as tools for a trade, a talent, or something he or she is known for.
- Pairs of related people, such as husband and wife, father and son, mother and daughter, and so on.
- Any other combination that fits your particular interests.

It is relatively easy to add captions to the pictures on the computer. The pictures can be printed in color or black and white on plain paper, cardstock or photo paper and glued to sturdier cardboard and laminated for durability.

Go Fish (and other card games)

Create playing cards, each with the picture of an ancestor, color coded in suits if needed for the particular game you are trying to play. The rules for "Go Fish" work really well for this kind of activity, but you can also choose rules for a different game.

The cards should be in sets of four (at least 10 sets), printed on cardstock, and laminated whenever possible.

Sets can consist of:

- Siblings or cousins.
- Parents and children.
- Four items referring to the same person, such as a picture of the person on one card, his or her name on another card, date and place of birth or residence on another card, and something about occupation on the fourth card.

Pedigree Match Game

Create a pedigree chart that has a color-coded symbol in place of each name. Create small name cards, each with a symbol matching a symbol on the chart. Have the children complete the chart by matching cards to symbols and placing the cards on the pedigree chart. Even very young children can have fun doing this.

A variation of this game is to put the names next to the symbols on the chart. Put the same symbols (one for each ancestor) on the cards next to the person's picture. The child then matches the picture to the name. The symbol is an added helpful tool.

For older children (age six and over), put the names on the chart and make cards with pictures, but leave the symbols off. The child needs to remember which picture goes with which name, and the game is more challenging.

Crossing the Ocean Game

Create a game board with fields showing a point of departure and a destination. An example would be a blue board with something depicting Europe on one end and the U.S. on the other. Then you can use felt playing pieces or little men to move along the board, using dice to determine the number of spaces to move the pieces. You can color in random fields, where the player has to take an "Event" card and follow the directions (going back or forward). Events can be good or bad. Make them up to fit your emigrant or pioneer ancestors' experience.

A commercial game board (such as Chutes and Ladders) can easily be modified along these lines.

Bingo

For a bingo card, create a 5x5 table in a word processing program, and paste a picture in each square. The center square is "Free," so you can put a family logo of some kind in it. Print out one card at a time, and vary the position of the pictures on each card. Have more pictures than spaces so not all cards contain every picture. Laminate the cards. Use buttons, candy, beans, or something similar as playing pieces.

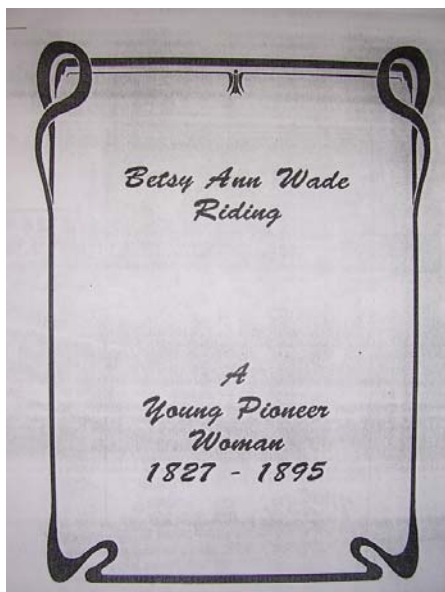
As a variation, you could simply type the name of an ancestor in each square.

Woodbury Family Bingo

Angus Munn Woodbury	Frederick James Granger	Joseph Blair McKay	Charles Lowell Walker	Hazel Vivian Valentine Spencer
Daniel George Spencer	Grace Atkin Woodbury	Winifred McKay Budge	Ida Jerusha Smith Greene	John Peter Atkin
Nymphus Jay Greene	Orin Nelson Woodbury	FREE	Thomas Francis Budge	Lovina Smith Walker
Jesse Lucius Smith	Annie Walker Atkin	Ann Cannon Woodbury	Joseph McKay	Ezra Granger Williams
Hyrum Daniel Smith	Jeremiah Woodbury	William Atkin	Amanda Hollingshead Smith	Elizabeth Bartlett Woodbury

Appendix B

Example of an Ancestor Coloring Book



The subject of your coloring book could be an individual, a couple, or a family. You could also create a coloring book based on a specific experience in an ancestor's life.



To illustrate the pages of your coloring book, use drawings, photographs, maps, and other visuals that have room for children to color. (Follow copyright laws.) You could even draw your own pictures.